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DE RUEHAK #0558/01 0711505
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 121505Z MAR 07
FM AMEMBASSY ANKARA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1294
RUEKJCS/CJCS WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHDC//PA
RUEUITH/ODC ANKARA TU
INFO RUEHTH/AMEMBASSY ATHENS 7885
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 2300
RUEHDA/AMCONSUL ADANA 1734
RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS 5796
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
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RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2169
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 000558

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JCS PASS J-5/CDR S. WRIGHT

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
MONDAY, MARCH 12, 2007

In Today's Papers

Iraq's Neighbors Meeting

All papers report Iraqi government spokesman Ali al-Dabbagh, following the meeting of Iraq's neighbors in Baghdad over the weekend, said that the foreign ministers of Iraq's neighbors and G-8 countries were now expected to gather in Istanbul. The US came together for the first time with Iran and Syria at the meeting. US Ambassador to Baghdad Zalmay Khalilzad said the venue and date of the next Iraq meeting has not been set yet. Turkey offered to host the meeting in Istanbul and should it take place, Secretary Rice has already stated she would attend, Khalilzad told a news conference. Several papers over the weekend reported it was not clear whether or not the next meeting will be held in Istanbul. Monday's Radikal notes the US was pressing for the meeting to be in Istanbul, while Iran and Iraq want it to be held in Baghdad. Hurriyet ties the objection coming from Tehran to the mysterious disappearance of the Iranian deputy defense minister Ali Reza Ashgari in Istanbul last month. The foreign ministers of Iraq's neighbors may meet in Cairo before the Istanbul conference. Papers commented over the weekend Ankara seems satisfied that the importance of protecting Iraq's territorial integrity has now become a pressing item for other countries as well.

Editorial Commentary on the PKK, Baghdad Iraq Conference

Gungor Mengi wrote in the mainstream daily Vatan (3/11): "The whereabouts of terrorists that threaten Turkey are a well known fact. There are about 3,500 armed terrorists, but only 500 of them are using the Kandil mountain area in Northern Iraq while the rest are scattered near Turkey's border with Iraq. The impact of a terrorist threat is very serious and every passing day Turkish people become more convinced that PKK terrorism is being protected by the US and Northern Iraqi Kurds, and is being used as a trump card against Turkey. Turkey does not want to create a tiff with Washington, and in the end this position allows the PKK to be more expansive in its activities. The US knows about anti-Americanism in Turkey is because of the PKK issue and that relations with the

Turkish state will deteriorate unless steps are taken against the terror problem. No government can allow terrorism to continue, particularly in an election year. Therefore, the recent warnings about the terrorist organization by Turkish military officials should be seen as a hint for further action. The US, this time, should cooperate with the Turkish military, and this will help America to win the hearts of Turks."

Murat Yetkin commented in the liberal-intellectual daily Radikal (3/10): "The Iraqi neighbors' conference was held in Baghdad and for the first time, the US participated. In the past, the US was not happy about this kind of meeting and did not think there would be results. The official US participation in the meeting this time indicates a significant change in American policy. If all goes well, the preliminary meeting will be followed first by a higher level and then a ministerial level summit which Secretary Rice is expected to attend. This means Secretary Rice will sit at a table with her Syrian and Iranian counterparts. If that happens, Iraq's political and geographical integrity will be ensured on an international scale and the Iraq issue will receive the focus of the international community. Will all of this produce relief in Turkey, especially concerning the fight against PKK terrorism? According to Turkish envoy Gen. Baser, some results have been achieved with the cooperation mechanism between Turkey and the US. He expressed satisfaction about his meeting with General Ralston in Istanbul, calling it a turning point for getting concrete results. The efforts to maintain Iraq's stability and integrity are very much in Turkey's interests. Thus, Turkey should watch for new developments resulting from last weekend's Baghdad meeting."

Wexler: 'US Should Not Lose Turkey'

Robert Wexler, the co-chairman of the Turkish Caucus in the US Congress, told mainstream Sabah in Washington the US should not lose

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an important ally such as Turkey. "There is no sense in further complicating matters at a time when logistic support to the thousands of US troops in Iraq is provided through Turkey. Looking at Russia's rising influence in the region, the strained atmosphere in the Middle East, and the increasing Sunni-Shiite conflict, we need Turkey's support more than we did in the past," Wexler said. He added he believed US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi will not insist on passing the Armenian resolution. "First we must keep our promises to Turkey. Turkey is the most important strategic ally of the US after Israel. It is also undoubtedly the most modern and progressive Muslim country," Wexler emphasized.

Erdogan: "Turkey Doesn't Attack its Neighbors"

Milliyet, Hurriyet, Radikal and others: Following FM Gul's remarks on Iran, in an interview with Arabic daily Al Anba, PM Erdogan said that Turkey will not let its soil be used for an attack against its neighbors and expressed his hope for a peaceful solution on Iran's nuclear program. Erdogan added that countries have the right to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes and noted that Turkey and Iran are in good relations and the two countries have developed mechanisms with the purpose of cooperation in the field of security.

Presidential Elections

Hurriyet, Milliyet: On his way back from Baku, PM Erdogan, answering a question whether there might be a surprise name in the Presidential election, said 'our lives are full of surprises. There might be a surprise name'. Close circles to the PM interpreted these comments as 'Erdogan has not decided on his candidacy yet'. Meanwhile, the main opposition party CHP leader Baykal said on Sunday at a party meeting that 'the premier, as if the problem isn't stemming from his own candidacy, is trying to divert attention through calling on the CHP to disclose its candidate. There is no such concern in the public. The President should be elected through compromise, not conflict'.

Swiss Court Sentences Turk for Denying Armenian Genocide Claims

All papers over the weekend and today report a Swiss court sentenced Dogu Perincek, head of the leftist-nationalist Turkish Workers' Party, for denying that mass killings of Armenians by Ottoman troops in 1915 amounted to genocide. Perincek was sentenced to a 90-day

suspended jail term and a fine of 3,000 Swiss francs. The Turkish Foreign Ministry (MFA) said in a statement, "The court case was inappropriate, groundless and controversial," adding the verdict cannot be accepted by the Turkish people. Perincek said he would appeal the verdict.

TV News:
(NTV, 8 A.M.)

Domestic News

- Turkey's counter-terrorism envoy Edip Baser has pointed to the moves to set up an independent Kurdish state in northern Iraq, stressing that this was a priority threat against Turkey's security.
- On Sunday, doctors and health workers staged a protest demonstration in Ankara in a last warning to the government before going on a work slow down strike on Wednesday.
- Prime Minister Erdogan will travel to Syria on April 3 for the opening of a new soccer stadium in Aleppo. Erdogan will be joined on the trip by Turkish soccer team Fenerbahce for a friendly match with a Syrian team.
- A Russian cargo ship carrying 22,000 ton of wheat collided with a private yacht in Istanbul causing the USD 300,000 yacht to sink into Bosphorus waters.

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International News

- Greek Cypriot leader Papadopoulos said he will start working on opening the Limnidi border gate between the two sides in Cyprus.
- American Enterprise Institute's Michael Rubin criticized the US for encouraging Kurdish illusions for independence.
- Al-Qaida's second in-chief Ayman al-Zawahiri has accused the Islamist Hamas movement of surrendering to Israel by reaching a deal with rival Palestinian faction Fatah.
- French President Jacques Chirac announced Sunday that after 12 years as president he would not seek a third term.

<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/ankara/>

WILSON